

T/SOR 36/5/1

Harry McShane

Before the first Hunger March was held at all John Maclean and myself held the first meeting of the unemployed on Glasgow Green. That was in November 1920. We went from that to Glasgow City Chambers and we saw the Labour Group and got permission to have a free let of the City Hall every Sunday or Thursday afternoon in which John Maclean was the main speaker but there was another speaker besides. We brought Captain White and a number of others to speak. I took the chair at all the meetings.

Captain White was a son of General Sir George White, a hero of Ladysmith, and he'd been a captain in the army. He was the man who trained the Irish Citizen Army during the Dublin strike which formed the nucleus of Connolly's army in the Easter Rising in 1916. John Maclean wasn't happy about White but he was a rather likeable sort of character. Erratic, a bit of an anarchist in some respects, he knew nothing about discipline. He knew nothing about politics either. But it didn't matter. He was sound in so far as what he wanted to do. He wanted a fight, that was the trouble with him. He didn't take part in Hunger Marches but he came to support. You couldn't keep White in anything. But he was there, prepared to fight. I liked the man. Jack White was a very fine person.

John Maclean was a great man for the unemployed. He and

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I used to walk along Great Western Road on a Sunday morning at nine o'clock to the churches. We wanted to try and get into the churches to protest. And I remember one morning we were going along the road and John says to me: "Go into the Church of England cathedral. I've got a class." So I said, "You'd better do your class." And I took the marchers. But when we got there the church people said: "Are you going in to worship?" I said, "In to protest about unemployment." The door was shut. We didn't get in. I felt relieved then! We carried a banner. It was one got out by John Maclean: "1914 Fighting - 1921 Starving".

But after a time nothing was happening anywhere in Scotland and I called them all together from Lanarkshire and the Vale of Leven to form an organisation in 1922. I got a meeting in a restaurant in Glasgow, corner of Wellington Street and Argyle Street. We used to meet there on Sunday morning and there I discussed it with the Vale of Leven people and the Lanarkshire people. We formed a sort of committee to run the movement. I took the initiative in doing the thing. I got in touch with Wal Hannington. He approved of the thing but he didn't know what I was intending doing. Neither did I. But we got it going and then they appointed me Scottish organiser, this committee did. And I started to work for quite a while as organiser until I went away to England in August 1923.

But in 1922 I got arrested. I wasn't on the first national Hunger March to London in October/November because I was out on bail. I couldn't break my bail to go on the March. Anyway I got a not proven verdict. And that was it. But I was not on any Marches until the '30s.

Bonar Law refused as prime minister to see the unemployed in 1922, when they went down on the Hunger March to London - he refused to see them. Bonar Law was M.P. for Glasgow Central. I wrote to him and asked him to come here to speak to the unemployed. He agreed with that. That's why he came, because he was M.P. Then when he agreed with that I suggested he make it a double thing. We invited Glasgow Trades Council. Bonar Law came and he agreed to meet both deputations. Both came together and met him the same day, same hall. But the Trades Council folk had a duplicated statement there. We - Johnny Milligan from Dundee and myself - had nothing. We just had our ordinary verbal statements. We had two-and-a-half hours with Bonar Law. I found him quite all right, very civilised. He regarded Milligan and I as being on the Left - he was quite right. He had more time for the fellows with the duplicated statements, the Trades Council people. We sneered at this duplicated statement.

Bonar Law dealt with bridges and roads he was goin' tae build to produce work for the unemployed. And the Trades Council had something similar to that. They were pretty much the same. And there was a sort of harmony between them. We were the outcasts. We were on the Left. We were asking for more to be done for the unemployed in paying benefits and so on - increase of benefits rather than public works. We were asking for that as well but our main concern was about the unemployed going hungry.

Bonar Law was quite sympathetic. He listened to us very carefully. He suffered Milligan and myself very well. It was not a heated discussion. It was a very sensible discussion, very

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calm, no heat at all. We tried to talk civilised to the man and he was civilised to us. He was entirely on his own, no officials.

In 1923 I went to England. I went to Nottinghamshire. I went after my wife. My wife went before me and I went to try and pick her up. I went to Leicester then I went from Leicester to Kent, from Kent back to Leicester. Then I went to the Yukon. I came back to Glasgow in 1930 and got involved again. I became the Scottish organiser of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. Wal Hannington appointed me as organiser and I worked here in Glasgow for quite a while with him. It wasn't a paid job at first but latterly they paid me £3 a week. It was a full-time job. We took an office in George Street, a wee den it was, a single room. And I moved from that into John Street, near the City Chambers, a single room again. We had nothing at all. I had some voluntary helpers now and again, some from Lanarkshire and some from the Vale of Leven: Alan Campbell from the Vale and a fellow called Henry something from Lanarkshire; I forget his name now. They helped me now and again. Later on we built branches all over Scotland. I can't remember how many members - but we had hundreds of members. It was 1935/36 when we reached the height.

I got very friendly wi' Wal Hannington and we got together in conferences at times. And then we began to work together. Wal Hannington had led a March, a Welsh March o' miners and he was quite carried away wi' this sort o' thing. So at one conference in London we decided in favour o' a National March. It would have a Scottish contingent. And the job was how to get the Scottish contingent. I was the Scottish organiser

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of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. And the Communist Party had endorsed this because of my sort of strong feeling about unemployment. The Communist Party decided I should continue with this work. So the thing was to get a Scottish contingent for the March. I argued of course that once we got a Scottish contingent the March was made. No Marches ever started until the Scotsmen got on the job. When they started to move then you got other places beginning to move. And we got the thing going.

Well, the '32 March was a difficult one because the authorities were not used to these kind o' things. Our first experience of it was at Auchinleck. That was the first obstacle we met with. Some women came out from Auchinleck and they said to me as we were marching with the Scottish contingent: "Don't go in there. There's hundreds o' policemen in there. Don't go there." So we said: "We're goin' in."

We walked right into the town. We walked right down the main road and turned back on the main road - we made that a habit. The police were there. They were fuming. And latterly we called a big meeting. We discovered that before we arrived a local workers' committee had met, had control of the hall, and decided not to let the Marchers have any accommodation in the hall. So these women got quite indignant and latterly they formed a deputation and went and seen this committee and we got the hall that night. We got the Marchers bedded down that night. We had no more trouble till we got near the Border.

In England it was much easier. I always recall when we got to Carlisle the Chief Constable there put everything on

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for us - baths, everything. I asked him, "Why are you doing all this for the Marchers?" He said, "I'll tell you why. I used to be in charge in Dumfries. And when the first Marchers came through I arrested some. My wife got on to me. I never forgot it. Since that I've tried to make up for it."

The discipline of the Marchers was tremendous. I had no trouble with them at all except one who gave us a bit of trouble and of whom I have some suspicions to this day. I understand that in a Government document opened to the public in recent years they said that one Marcher was a police informer. This man I'm talking about was Norman Kennedy. He was a joiner to trade and he had charge of the Dundee contingent. Every morning the Dundee contingent was always late in getting up. I used to go after them. They held us back. Kennedy got a habit of standing reading all the papers. He was guiding them, by his way of it - orders to the Marchers and so on. There were some rows. Latterly we had rows all the way down. Kennedy was a steward, an outstanding man - supposed to be. He was a member of the Communist Party. Latterly he went over and became a joiners' official.

On the March I got angry with him, because we went to Buckinghamshire and there we couldn't get accommodation for all the Marchers. The police came to me and asked me would we separate the Marchers at various places. They suggested the workhouse as one place. I thought it was a marvellous place for the unemployed and I agreed that the Dundee men should go there. They were giving us some trouble. But on the Sunday morning it was raining and he came down and said, "A dirty trick you did to us." I said, "What?" "Put us in the workhouse", and all that. Kennedy and I never got on after that. That was

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the only contingent we had trouble with all the way through, the Dundee contingent. And it was Norman Kennedy was responsible. He's dead now quite a long time. I want to make more enquiries about him. I always suspected him. We had one or two others who were known as informers. One o' them committed suicide, mentioned by Hannington in his book.

Now and again we had to expel somebody who just committed some misconduct. What we did then, we got a meeting of all the Marchers. We put the case to all of them. We got the endorsement o' all the Marchers for any expulsion we wanted to carry out. We avoided that as much as we possibly could because the chaps were very good.

The Marchers wore their own clothes. We all wore our own clothes, all of us. We didn't have any special uniform. All you had separate was a stick, a walking stick and your kit bag. That was all you had. I recall, for example, when we got to the Shap the first time, that first March, we had a meeting of all the Marchers. Should we march over the Shap 26½ miles or would we get a bus? We had a tremendous battle about this. We carried the vote against taking any buses and for marching all the way. We had a lorry, though, and we decided that some should put their kit on the lorry. Some of them didn't do it. They said they preferred to carry their kit over the Shap, right over the Shap. It made the March, mind you. We got over the Shap. For days many of our men were lame. I remember we got to Kendal - all the men were lame. Well, we had a march, a slow march: lame men - a very impressive march. We did very well.

We advised the Marchers that they have a change of

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shirts, that each one carry a blanket, and a plate for food. That was all - and a walking stick. The walking stick was a camouflaged sort of weapon. A lot of nonsense. Anyway there it was. We had that - a sort of symbol it was in a way. And it was very, very helpful.

We were never once involved in any riots with the police. The only ^{one} there was at Hyde Park with the Lancashire March. The Lancashire March had been beaten up at Birmingham. And when they got to Hyde Park there was another fight wi' the police. But we never had any trouble. They had beaten up the Lancashire Marchers. They all had bandages on their heads. They had beaten them up pretty badly. And we were determined we were gonnae fight back but we never had to.

There was never any trouble in Scotland on the Marches. The nearest we got to any scrimmage - it was not a fight at all - was on the Edinburgh March in 1933. We went to Edinburgh. We'd been to Edinburgh several times before that, you know, and we'd met officials of the Scottish Office on several occasions. In those days Sir Godfrey Collins was the Secretary of State for Scotland. He was M.P. for Greenock.

We went through and we were pretty late in getting into Edinburgh. We went through Kilsyth and down that road. McGovern was on that March. And when we got in we had accommodation the first night but on the Sunday they refused to give us accommodation. We sent a deputation to the police on Sunday afternoon. The police turned them down and after tea, after a meal at Leith, we marched up Leith Walk towards the centre of the town. And I remember the police coming to me and saying, "That's a good idea." Says I, "What's a good idea?" He says, "You're going /to sleep at

to sleep at Leith Links." I says, "We're no' sleeping at Leith Links." He says, "Where are ye going?" I says, "We're going to the police station." That was bluffin' them of course. We had to do a bit o' bluffin'.

So we got into Princes Street. We cut along Princes Street. And when we got along the Castle was lit. All the Marchers sat alongside there on the ground. So up came the police to me and they said to me: "You can't sit there. That'll cause an obstruction." I went to the Marchers: "The police say we can't sit here. The best thing you can do is get your blankets out!" They got out their blankets and they all lay down all the way along Princes Street. I'll never forget that. It was a marvellous sight, that was. I was delighted that night.

There was tremendous discipline. We stayed there all night. It was June, a marvellous night. And we slept on the pavement all night.

It was marvellous that night. But there was an alternative leadership came to Edinburgh we didn't know about. Gallacher, Kerrigan and one called Goldberg. So about two in the morning Goldberg came to me. He says, "You've got to try and find accommodation for the Marchers." "Eh? At two in the morning? I've been trying all the time to get accommodation." He said, "I'm no' going back. I gonnae stay here." He stayed there and remained with us. Kerrigan and them had an alternative leadership and they were in a house in Leith somewhere. They sent for us and we went down to see them. But we just went back to the Marchers. and we stayed there all night.

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The next day we didnae know what to do. Up came Gallacher to me. "Instructions: take the Marchers home tonight." I just said I wasn't. We argued about it. I learned we were gonnae get accommodation that night. And we got accommodation that night.

The following morning we decided to go on a deputation to the Town Clerk. I went on the deputation. Captain White was there and Reverend Warwick. Both of them went to see the Town Clerk and they came back empty handed. I always remember Captain White sitting down among the Marchers and he said to me: "You've a fine body of men here. If there's a fight let me in it." White liked fighting.

I told the Town Clerk, "All right. We've no money (which wasnae true). I relinquish responsibility for what happens now." And coming back over the Bridges I heard feet at my back. And there was the Chief Constable. He says, "Don't do anything drastic." I said, "What do I do?" He says, "I'll get buses for you." So we got buses back that night! All the fares paid - as far as Aberdeen even. We got all the fares paid to get the Marchers home.

When I was away the Communist Party had met and decided to expel me: I hadn't carried out instructions to take the Marchers home. When I got home I had won this victory. Instead of expelling me they congratulated me on my victory.

We decided later on there would be other Marches. And again of course I had the job of organising the unemployed in Scotland. Some way: at the Labour Exchanges and at the Parish Councils. We hadnae any trouble in recruiting Marchers. See, in those days it was easier to get to the unemployed than

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it is now. The unemployed signed on on Wednesday and got paid on a Friday. And we went always on a Wednesday or a Friday to the Labour Exchange. And we could always get a big crowd at the Labour Exchange and hold a meeting on top o' a chair. And from there we organised all our marches and all activities. We managed to get some rights. We got the right to represent unemployed at the court of referees. Then we also went a big lot to the Parish Council in those days, and going to the Parish Council and to the Labour Exchanges we got all the contact with the unemployed. That was particularly true in Glasgow and maybe more so in the Vale of Leven, where we had a very able fellow Alan Campbell. Alan Campbell was a marvellous fellow. He got too fond of the beer latterly. Anyway we got Alan Campbell and two Communist councillors there, Hugh McIntyre and Dan O'Hare and one or two others. We got them to help us as much as they possibly could and finally the Parish Council broke the rules. And the Scottish Board of Health it was then, they said: "Surcharge the Parish Councillors." Through the Co-operative and the Parish Council we did very well. We had a tremendous fight down there and the Communist councillors fought very hard inside the Council to get things done and we made some progress. The Vale of Leven was a very good help to us, because between that and one or two others in Lanarkshire we were able to get things going pretty well. And we also had a tremendous support here in Glasgow as well.

About other Hunger Marches to London: there was the 1934 March and the 1936 March. On the '34 March John McGovern did agree to join with us. McGovern was an I.L.P. M.P. with a rather chequered career before he joined the labour movement.

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He had been an anarchist. He was once Guy Aldred's selection agent actually against John Wheatley. Later he was fightin' Wheatley's seat at Shettleston when Wheatley died. So McGovern was a rather peculiar sort of character. But he did agree to join with us on the Hunger March. He was very good on the March, I'll say that about him. One day he said to me going through Manchester, "See what a' thae folk round there are saying?" I said, "What are they saying?" He said, "They're saying, 'Look at these two bloody Irish bastards.'" And that was the way he saw things. But he was very good at helpin' the Marchers.

When we were at Carlisle we ran short o' money. We had to feed the Marchers, which meant we had to buy food every day. So what we did do was when we arrived in Carlisle, we said we would have a day of rest but to try and get the use of the workhouse, as we did. The Marchers were in the workhouse and I went away that night to London, where there was going to be a meeting at the Memorial Hall. Harry Pollitt was to speak. I went straight down and spoke there, told them that we needed money, and we got £85 that night. I came back that night and it was the first time I ever had a sleeper in my life, a sleeper back to Carlisle. The next day we were on the road again - away.

We had no more problem with money after that. We went through all the main towns and were able to take collections. and were able to get quite a tremendous amount of support. We had a man who went ahead always to the various towns and fixed up accommodation wi' the town clerk or the local people he could get contact with. We had George Middleton doing that. He was a very competent man, a rough sort of type, a man not against using physical violence on people. But he was very

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able and you could rely on him to do a job for you when he went ahead to try to get things done.

One of our troubles was that the Labour Party were opposed to the earlier Marches. Mary McArthur, who was a woman organiser of the Labour Party, used to go ahead of us and advise people not to have anything to do with us. The Labour Party were opposed to anything, opposed to the Communist Party mainly. It's quite true to say that Hannington and myself were members of the Communist Party. And most of the leading elements were members of the Communist Party, not all of them. But it is quite true we were and they were strongly opposed to us. Anyway they did a lot o' that and it did a lot o' harm to us. But later on we managed to get Attlee to agree to support a March and speak with us in Hyde Park. We got Attlee and we got the assistance of Aneurin Bevan, who was a tremendously fine person. But he was a follower of James Maxton and I didn't think Maxton and Bevan were in the same street. I always regarded Bevan as being much superior and much abler and with a better understanding. I don't think Maxton ever understood at all. He didn't, he was too damn lazy. But he never tried to understand whereas Bevan did. And I think Bevan did a tremendous job. He was a great orator too, a very fine speaker. He could get an audience in the hollow of his hand without any trouble at all. He was probably the best speaker I've ever heard. I got very friendly with him. I liked the man. It was on the 19³⁴ March that I first met him. I got very friendly with him and a number of others of course. But Aneurin Bevan was very, very helpful and very friendly.

The I.L.P. seemed to do strange things at times. Sometimes they would support us. Then they tried to form separate

Unemployed Committees, separate entirely from us. They and the British T.U.C. were doing the same thing, forming rival bodies.

We had contingents of women on the Marches in England led by Maud Brown, an organiser of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. She was in charge of the legal department. She was a very fine person, not good looking or anything like that, but a very fine person. She worked very hard in the legal department. We had a good legal department. And she kept Hannington and myself in order!

We never allowed women among the men on the Marches. We didn't like women marching with the men in case there was any scandal. We were determined we would not have any scandal. There was a women's contingent and they were separate. They marched a separate road. But at one place we did meet. And McGovern came to me. He says, "Harry, I think you should go across the river," he says, "there's some men there massaging the legs o' some o' these women." So I went across and I spoke to Maud Brown and that was stopped.

We were very concerned to keep up the good name of the Marchers. We were determined not to allow anything disgraceful to crop up and nothing happened that we know of, beyond the fact that on the previous March in 1932 there was a fellow picked up a girl who was pregnant. And my attention was drawn to the fact that the girl was on the March. I went back and I got her put off the March. And you know what that fellow did? He left the March and got married to her. It was at Stoke. It had nothing to do with us at all. But that's what he did. But beyond that nothing happened that I could point to. I think we were a bunch of bloody Puritans!

When the 1934 March got to London we decided we would go

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and see Ramsay MacDonald, who was then prime minister. And we had a note from James Maxton which I always remember. When I opened it up it said: "I've never asked for anything before, Mac, but I'm asking this time you meet the Marchers." and MacDonald replied to the effect, "It's quite true, Jimmy, you never asked for anything before. But I can't meet these marchers because the T.U.C. has turned them down." We got in the front door at 10 Downing Street, we never got past the second door. That's the nearest we ever got to Downing Street, into the front door.

We never saw MacDonald. We had to fight our way through the other M.P.s, various M.P.s that we knew in the House of Commons. I will say that on the whole our reception in the House of Commons from many of the M.P.s was very, very good. and it did help us a big lot.

The 1936 March was the most outstanding March of all. On the 1934 March I was in charge and Peter Kerrigan didn't like this at all. He always thought he was a leader of the Communist Party. When it came to the 1936 March, ^{what} they suggested then was that I don't take the Glasgow March but that I should take the March from Edinburgh and he'd be in charge of the Glasgow March. But Peter worked out all right. He expelled more people than I did. But never mind, he was the leader o' the March and made a good job o' that March. The only trouble wi' Peter Kerrigan was he had even less brains than Maxton. The fact is he didn't know anything about anything beyond the Party line. He always knew the Party line and he could carry through the Party line. He carried out every instruction very carefully. That's what Pollitt liked about him, he always carried out the instructions. Pollitt talked to me about him.

Kerrigan was an engineer, he never worked much at engineering. He was very young when he was appointed a full-time organiser.

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He was an employee of the Communist Party from beginning to end. They got him when he was very young.

Well, for the 1936 March they told me that I was going to get an assistant. The Communist Party was to give me an assistant. And the man they gave me was Alex Hoffat, Abe Hoffat's younger brother. And I rejected him, because Alex had been involved in two or three fights wi' the police when drinking. But I got a promise he wouldn't take any drink. And he didn't take any drink on the March all the way down. He was a tremendous help to me, Alex Hoffat. He had a great sense o' humour. He thought it all very funny. And he played a very big part on the road right down to London.

We got accommodation in most places. We got some help from the Labour Party. Prior to that there was obstacles from the Labour Party. But on that last March they were able to help us.

Sometimes we even got food in Woolworth's, a meal in Woolworth's. They gave us food sometimes. And we made the most of that. They were very good at times. And then it saved an awful lot of trouble in cooking it.

We'd rules for feeding. The contingent that was first today in being fed was at the end of the queue next day. Nobody ever complained and we got through that very well.

We had very good food for the Marchers. They were well fed all the way through. I think most of them looked forward to the March because they were gettin' better fed, I think, on the Marches than they were at home. You depended on the money that you raised. You bought food. We had cooks. We had a regular hot meal in the morning. We had a good meal at lunchtime

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and a good meal at night. We had a break in the afternoon. I'm telling you, they were living in luxury! Nobody ever complained that I knew about, about the food. There was nothing to complain about. As a matter of fact we liked it ourselves. We just did the same as they did. We had to wait at the very end of the queue. Hannington and I had to go to the very end of the queue always, always did that.

We had a fellow died. Apparently there was somebody before who had died on a March and they hushed it up. We weren't hushing this up at all. He was a fellow called Halpin, I think it was. I forget where it was he died. We buried him in the local area and we carried a banner draped in black. And I remember when we got to Hyde Park there was thousands there watching us coming and all the hats and caps came off when they saw this man had died on the March. Halpin his name was. I always remember him. His face was always black wi' smoke and he was always standing stirring porridge. He was a funny strange character. He came frae Edinburgh. I think he died of malnutrition, I'm not quite sure. Oh, he wasn't very well obviously. He was as black as could be, you know. You'd ha' thought he was a negro. And it was smoke, I think.

Our 1936 March was when Ellen Wilkinson led the Jarrow Marchers. We didn't see them as a rival group. We worked very well together. It's not true to say we were in rivalry. There was no rivalry at all. As a matter of fact we got on very well with them. They helped us and we helped them. They were on a different basis from us, of course. They had the whole town of Jarrow behind them, Tory councillors too. We took unemployed from Scotland and all over Britain into London and

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we had a much bigger March than they had. But I remember Ellen coming into London. Her and Jennie Lee came in together and they marched right into London. I liked Ellen Wilkinson, liked her very much. She was very forthright, very straightforward, I thought, very competent. I liked her probably better than any of the other people I knew on any of the Marches. I always remember she told people off if she felt like telling them off. I remember she told Gallacher off one day. We went down Whitehall. Gallacher said something derogatory about somebody's character. And Ellen went to town wi' him. She was really forthright and didn't mince any words about it. It's a pity she died too young. That was an unfortunate thing. She was a very fine woman.

Jenny Lee was very helpful in those days. Anselin Bevan was very helpful. They were all very helpful, Maxton as far as he could be. As a matter of fact he never impressed me very much. But some of the others did. I've nothing against Jimmy Maxton. I always thought he was a bit of an innocent politically. He was too lazy, I think. I don't think he had any brains either.

There were one or two other people I wanted to refer to, such as Tom Mann. Tom Mann was a great friend of ours, a loyal man, able man, began to get a wee bit decrepit in his old age, like me probably. Anyway latterly he didn't seem to keep up to date but he did his best and kept doing what he could in the way of agitations. I always recall one thing about him. He got Hannington and I into trouble once. ~~We had a conference in Manchester.~~ (We had a conference in Manchester and at that conference there were two women, Eva

/Gibbons

Gibbons from Edinburgh and Bessie Braddock, who later became a Labour M.P. for Liverpool. I was in the chair at this conference and they were bobbing up three times on every subject and I was trying to keep them down. I wanted the conference finished because we had a meeting that night. Then they charged me wi' bein' prejudiced against women, which I never was. Latterly we were finished but we were late. I said to Tom Mann, "We're too late to get a meal, we can't get anything to eat." He said, "We'll go to Yates' White Lodge, we'll get a half pint o' beer and there's always a basket there wi' buttered biscuits." That's what we did. And when we got to this other hall where the meeting was there was a great big high flight of stairs. When we got to the top o' the stair there's Eva Gibbons in a towering rage. Wherever Tom went he kissed all the women. He went to kiss Eva and Eva - the first time I ever saw it - turned away her head and went out o' the hall. And at the meeting Tom put on his usual stunts. He thought he could do maybe some o' the old type o' labour leaders at the T.U.C., how they came across the platform, sat down and fell asleep and only woke up when some young fellow, some militant in the hall raised some question or other - then they would rise in protest. He worked in how every resolution passed by the T.U.C. started by saying, "We call upon Parliament assembled..." All about Parliament, and he worked up to such a way latterly that he was down on his knees on the platform praying to Parliament. It went very well. But the young Communists never saw anything like this before in their lives and they made a complaint about us: we came late, we came late because we were drunk. Tom Mann tried to kiss the women. And then he was down on his knees on the platform. And this

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was the indictment. Of course the Communist Party Executive knew Tom Mann. They knew him better than they did. That was the way Tom Mann was. And he had some of the old habits he was still repeating. He was outstanding at that sort of thing.

Well, on the 1936 March, when we got to London, we decided to take part in the Cenotaph thing. The I.L.P. were opposed to us. But we decided to go. So we got permission to go. The conditions were that the band instruments were to be left at the Embankment and we would keep order. I think we marched better than anybody else at that Cenotaph thing. We took part in that. There was a bit of a row about that. One or two I.L.P. fought with us. We didn't try it again. But we did it that time.

On that March, that last March, we did something we'd never done before. We got a £1,000 surplus. That was a tremendous amount o' money. And one of our troubles was - what would we do wi' the £1,000? We formed what we called a March Council. It included Bevan, Harry Pollitt, Tom Mann, Jennie Lee, Ellen Wilkinson. And so the Communist Party gave Harry and myself instructions that we had to support the idea of this money going to the March Council and not to us in the N.U.W.M. We went wi' the intention o' carrying out the Communist Party instructions but when we got there we found to our surprise that Jennie Lee and Ellen Wilkinson were proposing that it be handed over to the National Unemployed Workers' Movement! And we had to oppose that! We used the money to put organisers in various towns on the job. I got Alan Campbell to go to Edinburgh, for example, and gave him £2 a week. But Alan was too fond o' drink by this time. He was in Edinburgh a week and I just had to bring him back. The Edinburgh people objected, he was such an able fellow. So he

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stayed another week - and he got drunk and got arrested drunk. And that finished that.

On the Hunger Marches the Scots always brought a flute band. Only the Scots Marchers did that. We had everything. The Scots were away ahead o' everybody else. And we always had a band, a Scottish band. I always remember one place, Hannington said to me: "Last night, when I was in bed, all I could hear was these flutes all night." We had that band everywhere.

I don't think there was whistling on the Marches. But we always kept singing. One night they started singing and it created a tremendous impression. It was some song, an ordinary Scottish song. And I never forgot that. I'm trying to think o' the tune. Anyway it was tremendous singing. The Scottish Marchers liked to sing. I think we raised the morale o' the rest o' the Marchers to some extent. I was always proud o' the Scottish Marchers.

We used to get to the Border and Wal Hannington would come along and lead them in singing McGregor's Gathering. We never got over the Border without singing The Internationale, because we were entering England. We made the most of that. Hannington was a fine singer.

Wal Hannington was an engineer. He'd worked during the War in some place, Slough I think it was. The place went bankrupt. Anyway when he came out he started to organise among the unemployed about 1919. He became an Executive member of the Communist Party and finally he was taken on as a consultative member of the General Council of the British T.U.C. Then they sacked him. He was a marvellous speaker,
/a very able

a very able fellow, a very courageous character that I liked very much. I knew him very well. He dedicated one of his books to me, Ten Lean Years. The trouble with him was at two in the morning he wanted to play chess. I used to fall asleep between the moves. Once I won when I was falling asleep and I boasted about that. He and I were very, very friendly. That was one of our troubles, that Pollitt and them knew this. There was a famous occasion. They wanted to try and break us up and form what they called Unemployed Councils. Something of this kind had happened in Moscow long before the Revolution and they wanted to do the same as they did in Moscow. You know the sort of thing. They wanted to do it here and we opposed it and Hannington was brought across to Moscow to defend himself. When he got across there he gave a famous speech in which he talked about the output of steel in the Soviet Union and forgot all about the unemployed. Pollitt said to him: "You so-and-so. You've insulted the Communist International." So Manuilsky again invited Hannington to come up and speak about unemployment. And Hannington got a second bite at the cherry.

What made the Hunger Marches a real success, I think, was the backing we got from ordinary working class people. Local people were generally sympathetic to the Marchers. They come out everywhere in big droves, particularly in England. We had tremendous turnouts to see the Marchers. And we got money from them all. And the money kept us going.

The purpose of the Marches was mainly to draw attention to the evils of the Means Test and to attack the government at the time on the kind of treatment the unemployed were getting. What the unemployed were getting was terrible.

/You'd get a

You'd get a married couple getting fifteen shillings. It was a scandalous situation. And there was real hardship among the unemployed in those days. Our main object was to draw attention to the hardship of the unemployed and to the extent of unemployment and so on. And at that time it was a crisis. And at that time of course the Communist Party was making the most of it. They were saying, "Look at the tremendous achievements of the Soviet Union. And we've got a great crisis here in Britain."

I think the Hunger Marches did achieve something in the sense that they actually drew attention I think to some of the increases we got. For instance, I had a fight in Glasgow to get increases for the unemployed children of sixpence, from 1/6d to 2/-. Sixpence was a lot of money in those days. But to get every child an extra sixpence, I had a big fight over that. I got it ultimately. Well, we got that kind o' thing and small concessions here and there. We were able to bully many of the people on the Parish Councils and get some sort of concessions for individuals at times. I think we did a lot of good. I think to keep the fight going was a tremendous thing. That's what's wrong now. It's not being done just now.